



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### Fish and Wildlife Service

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#### AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES THREATEN MAJOR WATERWAYS PUBLIC MEETINGS TO BE HELD TO DISCUSS PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The Great Lakes and a number of this country's best known rivers are teeming with activity that does not belong there. It is the presence of introduced non-native aquatic species in this Nation's waterways. As part of the effort to address this problem, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced public meetings will be held in Maryland, California, Hawaii, Florida, Minnesota, and New York, December 7-17, 1992.

The hundreds of transoceanic vessels that visit the Great Lakes annually, in addition to cargo, carry millions of gallons of water for ballast which must be unloaded upon arrival. But sometimes, traveling along with the fresh or brackish ballast are some pesky non-native aquatic life forms which are wreaking havoc in America's waterways. The zebra mussel, and the ruffe, a small fish, are just a couple of recent examples.

The zebra mussel, native to the Caspian Sea, was first detected in Lake St. Clair near Detroit, Michigan in 1988. Prolific, the mussel is now abundant in Lake Erie and western Lake Ontario and found in major rivers such as the Mississippi, Illinois, Hudson, Susquehanna, and Ohio. Municipal water treatment

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and power plant facilities are being threatened because the mussels attach to hard surfaces and obstruct pipes, hoses, and screens. Recently, an intake pipe became so encrusted with mollusks that its diameter was virtually cut reduced by half, nearly shutting off the water supply to the city of Monroe, Michigan.

Zebra mussels are also becoming encrusted on native species, fouling commercial fishing nets and boat hulls, and littering swimming beaches. They are also altering the feeding and migration patterns of mussel-eating waterfowl, and the feeding behavior of some fishes.

The ruffe, a cool-water European perch, has recently colonized Duluth Harbor at the western end of Lake Superior. The current ruffe colony in Duluth Harbor number approximately 2 million. A small fish, less than 5 inches long, the ruffe is now the single most abundant of over 60 fish species found in the harbor and is causing dramatic declines among fish species. It competes with the native fish for food and feeds voraciously on the eggs and larvae of more valuable species such as whitefish and other perch.

In 1990, in response to these rapidly spreading threats, Congress enacted the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act which created the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. The Task Force, made up of seven Federal agencies and eight representatives of State, tribal, local, and other non-Federal governmental organizations, is co-chaired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Act charged the task force with developing a national program to:

- o reduce the risk or prevent the unintentional introduction of these species;
- o ensure prompt detection of the presence of and monitor changes in the spread of these species; and
- o control those species already established.

The Task Force has now developed a proposed cooperative program which outlines measures to prevent further introductions, detect those that slip through, and control existing aquatic nuisance species. In addition, it includes research, technical assistance, and education activities as well as a zebra mussel program.

At the public meetings on the proposed program, task force members will provide information and answer questions. Participants will have an opportunity to provide comments. The meetings are part of a broader effort to gather information from interested individuals and organizations concerning the proposed program.

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The dates and sites for the public meetings are as follows:

- o Baltimore, Maryland -- December 7, 1992; National Aquarium, 501 E. Pratt Street (Inner Harbor); 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.
- o Newark, California -- December 9, 1992; Visitor Center, San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, One Marshlands Road; 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.
- o Honolulu, Hawaii -- December 11, 1992; Prince Kuhio Federal Building, Room 6118, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard; 9 a.m. - noon.
- o St. Petersburg, Florida -- December 15, 1992; National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Office, Duval Building, Room 204, 9450 Kroger Boulevard; 9 a.m. - noon.
- o Duluth, Minnesota -- December 16, 1992; Federal Building, Room 407, 515 W. First Street; 9 a.m. - noon.
- o Buffalo, New York -- December 17, 1992; Tifft Nature Preserve, 1200 Fuhrmann Boulevard; 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Copies of the document can be obtained from Robert A. Peoples, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., (820 ARLSQ) Washington, D.C. 20240 or by telephone (703) 358-1718. Written comments on the proposed program should be submitted to this address by January 4, 1993.